



THE COLLEGE OF
OPTOMETRISTS

Accreditation of higher qualifications

Guidance for course providers

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1. Introduction

This guidance is for course providers wishing to apply for a College of Optometrists- (College) accredited higher qualification. This document gives you information on the College Higher Qualifications framework and how to achieve accreditation.

We welcome applications from providers offering training programmes for professionals that clearly reflect the needs and requirements of optometrists in the UK. Providers can submit applications as a sole provider, a partnership or a consortium.

2. College-accredited qualifications

2.1 Types of qualification

We accredit three levels of qualification:

- a. **Professional Certificate:** the entry point (15-20 credits)
- b. **Professional Higher Certificate:** builds on the Certificate (30-40 credits, including Professional Certificate credits)
- c. **Professional Diploma:** builds on the Higher Certificate (60-75 credits, including Professional Higher Certificate credits)

2.2 Credits

The learning outcomes for each of our qualifications state how many credits are awarded at each level.

The College recognises different course providers use varying credit systems for courses, so the exact number of credits required for a qualification is flexible. For example, a Professional Certificate worth 15-20 credits equates to 150 to 200 guided learning hours, which may include taught theoretical and practical sessions, guided and independent study, preparation for assessment and assessment activities.

See Appendix 1 for more information about the framework of the qualifications.

Visit our [Higher Qualifications](#) webpages for more information.

3. Applying for accreditation

3.1 The accreditation process

Please see the diagram in Appendix 1.

The accreditation panel meets at various points in the year. Please refer to the bottom of the [Higher Qualifications](#) page on the College website for dates.

We will keep you informed at each stage of your submission and give you the opportunity to answer any questions or supply additional information if we think it will assist your course accreditation.

We may invite you to attend part of the accreditation meeting, in person or via a teleconference. This is to enable the panel to clarify any points.

Please note that:

- where possible, the panel will give the outcome to your representative at the conclusion of the meeting
- we cannot cover expenses involved in attending a meeting.

After considering a course for accreditation, the panel will produce a report for you. The report will state the panel's decision along with areas of good practice and any issues to be addressed, including any details regarding resubmission.

If the panel considers a particular section meets the standard overall, but feels there are some things which could be improved, the panel will make a recommendation for improvement. This will not mean the section has failed to meet the criteria, but that the panel recommends you consider how to improve it.

In cases where a section has not met the criteria, the report will state the required changes needed in order to meet the criteria. You must address these if you resubmit your application.

3.2 Complete an application

Please complete an application form (digital format) and email it to us for consideration by the accreditation panel. The application form is available from stephanie.hamilton@college-optometrists.org

3.3 General points for presentation

Please submit the application with consecutively numbered pages for the entire document.

Please label each section clearly. If you present any information as an appendix, ensure that this is cross-referenced clearly in the answers included in the application form so the accreditation panel can easily find the information they need.

We encourage you to use material that is already available, for example, handbooks or guidance. However, please cite and highlight only the pages or sections relevant to the submission for College accreditation.

Please ensure that the information you submit is relevant to the course for which you are requesting accreditation. In some cases, the course may form part of a larger

qualification; for example, it may be one module from an MSc programme. Please do not submit general statements and / or information about assessment or marking, which are only relevant to the larger qualification. While overarching assessment regulations and subject or university grading criteria provide useful context for the frameworks under which the qualification is delivered, it is important to provide specific information about your marking criteria and how you set standards for each of the assessments that form part of the higher qualification. This assures the panel that the Higher Qualification learning outcomes are met in a rigorous, but proportionate, manner.

Where possible, use links to your website to show examples of course content or assessment questions. It is usually easier for the panel to understand content by seeing something in context.

3.4 Information you must provide

Section 1: Admissions

All practising optometrists are eligible for admission to Professional Certificate higher qualifications. Other relevant ophthalmic practitioners may also be admitted to the course subject to verification by the provider of equivalent core underpinning competencies and knowledge.

Admission to a Higher Professional Certificate requires prior completion of the Professional Certificate in the same subject, and a Higher Professional Certificate in turn qualifies candidates for admission to the Professional Diploma in the same subject.

Providers are expected to recognise all other providers' qualifications for this purpose. This should be made clear in programme or module specifications.

Section 2: Curricular content, structure and delivery

1. You must give a clear outline of your proposed course. Include:

- a module descriptor
- a timeline to show your overall process and how course components fit together, for example online lectures, practical days, clinical placement and assessment (please use our template, within the application form)
- information which shows how your course meets the requirements of the learning outcomes (please use our template, the Learning Outcomes Mapping Grid, within the application form) and a list of the lecturers, assessors, examiners and external examiners involved in the course, including their relevant qualifications and experience
- details of your teaching and learning strategies
- a list of formative assessment methods, e.g. MCQs, VRICS, SAQs, etc., along with samples of the different questions
- details of how you give feedback to students on their formative assessments.

Section 3: Assessment

1. Pass marks

We require a pass mark of 50% minimum for College-accredited higher qualifications, this is the accepted standard in the sector. If your application is for a qualification which is a module as part of an MSc programme it is inappropriate for that module to have different pass marks in different contexts.

2. Compensation

We do not allow compensation for College-accredited higher qualifications, i.e in MSc programmes where students can gain an overall pass for the whole programme, even if they do not pass all the elements. This could lead to a student being awarded a College-accredited qualification when they have not passed the relevant assessments and therefore not met the learning outcomes. The College requests that in these instances course providers either:

a) state that the College-accredited higher qualification is only awarded to students who pass the module i.e. that it is awarded independently of the MSc, or

b) make the College-accredited higher qualification mandatory (i.e. it must be passed) as distinct from compulsory (i.e. it must be studied) for the main award.

3. Please make clear how you set standards for your course.

4. Provide clear information that shows how you will summatively assess each learning outcome.

5. Please make clear your assessment arrangements. Include:

- a list of summative assessment methods, e.g. a logbook, a practical examination
- the types of questions and samples of the different questions, e.g. MCQs, VRICs, SAQs, OSCE stations etc.
- the pass mark
- the marking scheme
- details of any elements which must be passed for a student to pass the assessment overall
- your timescales for marking summative assessments and notifying students of their results.

6. Facilities for assessment.

Section 4: Clinical placements

1. Only complete this section if your course includes clinical placements. Please include:
 - how you will set up, manage and monitor clinical placements to assure their safety and quality, e.g. your risk assessment process, your agreements with the placement provider
 - how students will be supported
 - how you will recruit, train and support mentors
 - how the placement covers the course learning outcomes and is assessed, e.g. assessor visits, logbook, etc., including an example logbook with templates for the record logs
 - a clinical placement handbook for students, mentors and supervisors including:
 - learning outcomes to be achieved
 - timings and duration of the clinical placement
 - records that should be kept
 - expectations of professional conduct
 - assessment procedures
 - lines of responsibility and means of communication.

Section 5: Guidance for students

1. Please submit a copy of your student handbook or guide. If the course is part of a larger programme for example, a module in a master's programme, please cite and highlight only the pages or sections relevant to the submission for College accreditation. The handbook should include:
 - a. the course timeline and timetable, including details of the practical days
 - b. course details, e.g. content, structure, delivery and assessment
 - c. support for students, including:
 - induction
 - distance learning
 - peer to peer and pastoral arrangements
 - complaint, appeal, reasonable adjustment requests
 - support available for learning (library, journals resources)
 - pastoral care (disabilities, nursery).

Section 6: Lecturer, assessor and examiner training and briefing

1. Please submit clear and detailed descriptions of the training provided for lecturers, assessors and examiners.

Section 7: Accreditation of prior learning (APL)

1. We welcome APL, but it is not a requirement of accreditation. If you wish to include APL in your course, please see Appendix 3.

Section 8: Quality assurance

1. Please refer to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education: [QAA quality code](#). Please explain the mechanisms you have to ensure patient safety where patients are being used.
2. If you are a university or other higher education institution (HEI) or in a partnership with a university or HEI your answers may refer to your relevant policies but you are not required to submit these documents.
3. You are required to have an external examiner; please include details of your means of appointing external examiners.
4. Please describe feedback mechanisms both to and from students. Please provide examples of feedback forms and show how students can give free text feedback as well as respond to pre-set questions.
5. Please provide a description of how you intend to respond to feedback from students.

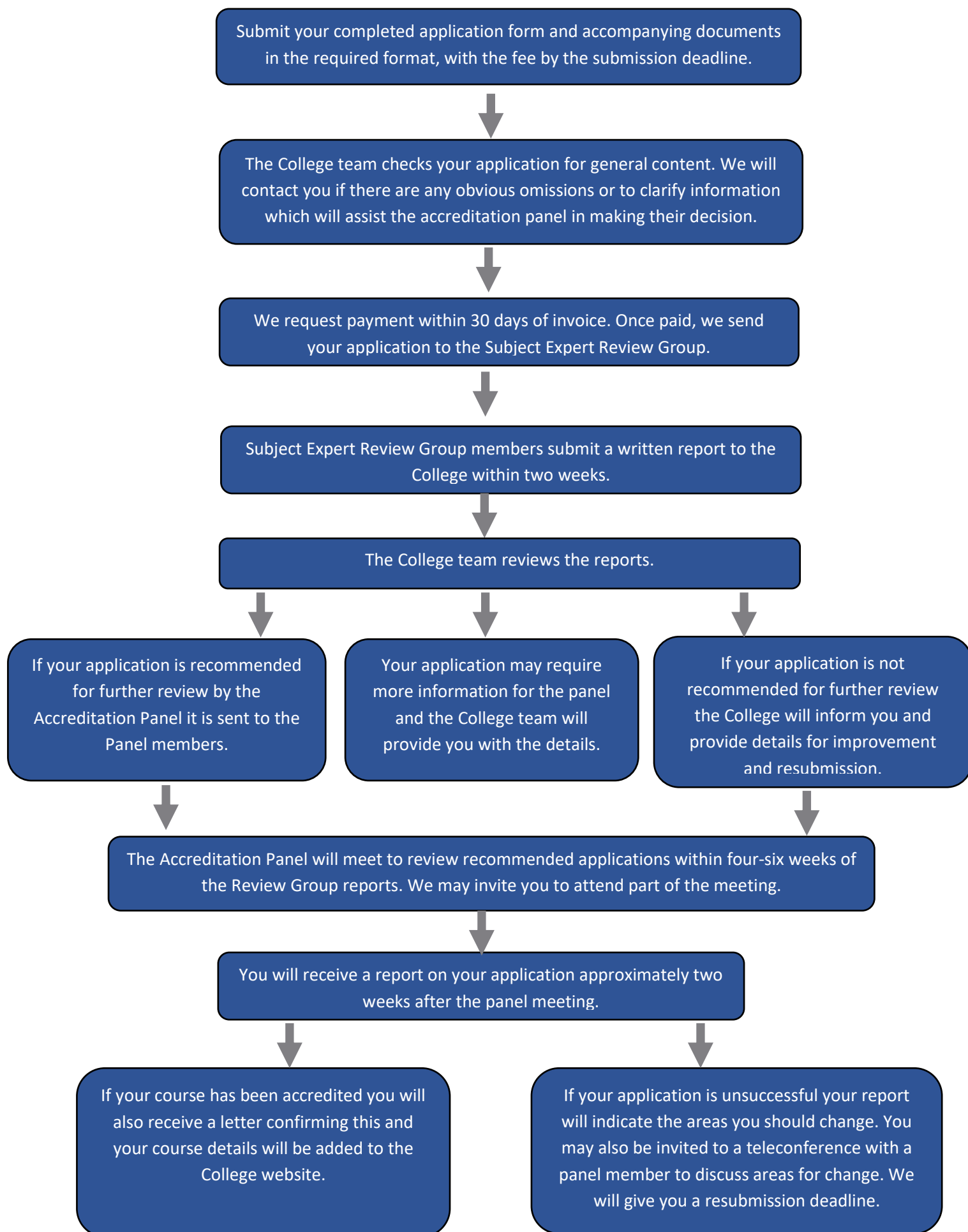
Section 9: Equality, diversity and inclusion

1. Please describe how your equality, diversity and inclusion policy is made clear to all staff and students, including those on distance learning courses.
2. If you are a university or other higher education institution (HEI) or in a partnership with a university or HEI your answers may refer to your relevant policies but you are not required to submit these documents.
3. Please describe how you handle reasonable adjustments and how teaching and assessment is delivered in an inclusive way.

4 Contact details

For further information about the accreditation process please contact the College at stephanie.hamilton@college-optometrists.org

Appendix 1 Application process for course providers



Appendix 2 The subject expert review group and accreditation panel

The subject expert review group and the accreditation panel consider applications for accreditation by the College. The panel report annually to the College's Education and Standards Committee.

Membership of the subject expert review group

A pool of subject experts from which to draw the following for any submission review:

- Two optometrists who are subject specialists.
- One ophthalmologist with specialist expertise in the subject, as necessary.

Membership of the panel

A pool of optometrists from which to draw the following for any meeting or submission review:

- Two optometrists with suitable expertise and experience of working in hospital or community practice.
- One experienced optometric educationalist

The Panel will be chaired by the Director of Education or their representative.

Appointments for the Accreditation Panel and the Subject Expert Group will be for up to two three-year periods and arrangements will be put in place towards the end of this time to ensure that there is a rolling membership.

Views will be sought from all members of the Accreditation Panel irrespective of whether or not they are able to attend meetings, and a consensus sought for any final decision.

Members of the College staff will attend Accreditation Panel meetings as appropriate and as advised by the Director of Education.

Appendix 3 Accreditation of prior learning (APL) policy for College-accredited higher qualifications

The College definition of accreditation of prior learning (APL) includes certificated learning, experiential learning and achievement. APL may be awarded to candidates as appropriate, i.e. the APL must be specific to the units and certificates already held by candidates. APL can count for no more than one third of the credits, rounded down. For example, a 20 credit course could have up to 6 credits via APL. A specific unit of APL can only be used for one course or College certificate.

Any student who holds a College-accredited higher qualification should have this recognised as a valid pre-requisite to apply for a course at another institution. For example, were a student awarded the Professional Certificate in Low Vision from one university, this should be accepted as entry to the Higher Professional Certificate at another institution.

Where a higher qualification requires a clinical placement candidates may be eligible for exemption from this clinical placement through accreditation of prior learning.

The criteria for exemption are:

- candidates must be current practitioners with relevant experience in the subject of the higher qualification and in an appropriate setting
- candidates must present a portfolio of the minimum required number of patient episodes from an appropriate setting as set out in the relevant higher qualification
- portfolio evidence must include details of relevant, specific workplace assessments which directly match the clinical skills learning outcomes in the relevant higher qualification
- items of evidence within a portfolio have a currency of two years.

For specific qualification requirements please see the learning outcomes on our website. These are available under each subject area on the [higher qualifications](#) page.

Qualifications currently requiring a placement are:

- Professional higher certificate in Glaucoma
- Professional diploma in Glaucoma
- Professional higher certificate in Medical Retina
- Professional diploma in Medical Retina.

Including APL in an accreditation application

If you include APL in an application for accreditation, please show that:

- your staff involved in APL arrangements are adequately trained in APL and sufficiently expert in the qualification for which the APL is being claimed
- your criteria, process and arrangements for APL are clearly stated to students
- the content of prior learning and achievement matches the learning outcomes of the College accredited higher qualification with regard to breadth and depth
- you have a widening participation policy
- you use a robust method for applying APL criteria for individuals' qualifications and experience against course learning outcomes
- you ensure students' evidence is current, valid, authentic and sufficient
- you have arrangements for moderation to ensure consistency in APL decisions
- you manage a personalised service which allows for the diversity of students' prior learning, but which can be quality assured and monitored.

Appendix 4 Advice from the Accreditation Panel

The following advice can help you with your application.

Course structure and delivery

- Provide a clear timeline.
- Consider the placement of practical days within the course structure. It is not advisable to hold a practical session in the morning and assess students later the same day. They need time to reflect and act on any feedback they receive from practical sessions in order to improve their skills prior to summative assessment.
- Show how your formative assessments contribute to students' learning and development. Formative assessments should not contribute to the module grade/outcome (pass/fail).

Assessment

- Provide examples of all the different types of assessment methods, materials and marking criteria.
- Consider what really requires assessment by OSCE, e.g. demonstrating an 'ability to' skill.
- Assess communication-related learning outcomes by the student demonstrating actual communication skills rather than *how* a student may communicate.

Guidance

- Provide a student handbook.
- Ensure module/ course specific information is grouped together in a logical order, and is easy to locate from among any more generic information.